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Al Karkh Maternity Hospital to Open Doors Soon

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BAGHDAD, Iraq –Al Karkh Maternity Hospital, located in the Karkh district of western Baghdad, received two large truckloads of much needed medical equipment; deliveries that will speed the opening of the hospital to hundreds of Baghdad mothers-to-be.

Sgt. 1st Class Hector Cruz, a construction representative from the Gulf Region Division, Army Corps of Engineers central district, makes final checks on numerous hospital construction initiatives recently completed. From new heating, ventilating and air conditioning to electrical and mechanical upgrades, GRD managed this U.S. funded hospital refurbishment. Nearly \$600 thousand was spent on sorely needed repairs to a hospital that received no upgrades and little maintenance from the Saddam regime. In fact, no new hospitals were completed in Iraq since the mid-1980s.

"To date, GRD has completed 21 renovations at 18 hospitals across Iraq that will treat 15,000 patients per day," said Brig. Gen. Jeffery Dorko, GRD commander. "Also, working with our Government of Iraq partners, we have constructed 113 of 132 new Primary Health-care Centers that will treat 8,000 Iraqis each day. We still have more to achieve in helping provide health care to Iraqis, but we are making great strides in this important area."

The improving security situation is paying dividends as GRD and its contractors complete more and more construction



Al Karkh Maternity Hospital operating theatres received extreme makeovers thanks to nearly \$600 thousand in much needed hospital repairs. The hospital is one of 18 Iraqi hospitals that were rehabilitated by the Gulf Region Division. Additional work at Al Karkh Maternity included mechanical, electrical and structural upgrades. (USACE photo)

projects. Dr. Eman A. Atta, Karkh's manager/hospital administrator, worked at Karkh Maternity for only six-months, but



Al Karkh Maternity Hospital has new elevators thanks to construction work managed by the Gulf Region Division. GRD recently completed nearly \$600 thousand in essential repairs at the hospital. The renovation effort included replacing the heating, ventilating and air conditioning system, mechanical system (boilers), electrical, structural, reverse osmosis water purification system and a new medical waste incinerator. (USACE photo)

has seen Baghdad and the neighborhood around the hospital improve dramatically.

"The security situation has improved greatly," said Atta. "It was very, very bad here for so long; so bad that I refused delivery of vital medical equipment until it was safe from those who would rob and steal from the hospital."

Dr. Atta was painfully aware of the poor security situation after one large delivery of expensive diagnostic equipment that included X-ray machines and other high-end medical equipment was hijacked. "Stolen before it ever made it to the hospital," she said with anger and frustration. "To keep this from happening again, Dr. Emad Sabry and I arranged to store the equipment in various secret locations around Baghdad until security improved."

Iraqi Army Maj. Hussain is in charge of security at Karkh and the area around

the hospital, and echoes Atta's reflection of security in the neighborhood. "It has gotten better, it is much safer here. My soldiers are always watching for any danger that would come to the hospital and its patients."

"We hope to open the hospital to inpatient care, surgeries and deliveries within two months," said Dr. Emad Sabry, an anesthesiologist and one of Karkh's ten senior physicians. "The hospital still needs additional equipment – all types from beds to incubators and most importantly the pharmaceuticals. The Ministry of Health has promised to provide these required items."

Managing scores of projects and frequently on construction sites four or five days each week, Cruz stays very busy. "We rely heavily on our Iraqi engineers who are on project sites every day,"

he said. "They work directly with the contractors and provide our office with regular reports, photos and updates on project progress. We just couldn't do the job without them."

To minimize interruptions of essential hospital activities, the local Iraqi construction firm coordinated all construction work with the hospital and Atta.

The renovation construction included replacing the HVAC system, mechanical system (boilers), electrical, structural, reverse osmosis water purification system, new medical waste incinerator, medical gases center, nurse call system, data communication network, TV system, elevator upgrade, and fire alarm with a fire fighting extinguishing system.

"The new medical gases center is much improved over the old Iraqi way," said Sabry. "This is much more modern, efficient and safer, too. The old way had oxygen tanks in each of the rooms. Hospital staff had to frequently move and handle the tanks – very inefficient and more dangerous."

"Previously, this was a facility in disrepair after years and years of neglect. But, now Karkh's patients will be able to come to the hospital and have their babies in a clean, secure functioning hospital," said Cruz. "Dr. Atta and her staff will have the tools to provide full spectrum medical care for women from a population of more than 250,000."



Al Karkh Maternity Hospital: The security situation has improved in recent months in Baghdad's western Karkh district. Hospital management now accepts deliveries of expensive medical equipment and supplies that were secretly stored off-site. The Gulf Region Division recently completed nearly \$600 thousand in essential repairs at the hospital. (USACE photo)

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